

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 HA-05 IO-13 CU-04 /093 W

-----107344 211822Z /50

R 211443Z FEB 78

FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0613

INFO AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE

USDAO KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIBREVILLE 0451

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PEPR, PINS, SHUM, GB, EK

SUBJ: ROUNDUP OF EQUATORIAL GUINEANS

1. LIBREVILLE'S EQUATORIAL GUINEAN POPULATION OVER THE LAST SEVERAL DAYS HAS BEEN SUBJECTED TO WHAT IS AT BEST A "CENSUS" AND AT WORST A HARRASSMENT CAMPAIGN OR EVEN VENDETTA. POLICE, ARMY AND GENDARMERIE TRUCKS HAVE BEEN SYSTEMATICALLY MOVING THROUGH THE EQUATORIAL GUINEANS NEIGHBORHOOD HAULING THE INHABITANTS TO POLICE STATIONS AND DETAINING ANY WHO DO NOT HAVE THEIR PAPERS IN ORDER. THERE ARE KNOW CASES OF BEATINGS BY THE POLICE -- THE LEAST DISCIPLINED OF THE SECURITY FORCES -- AND ONE REPORT OF A LYNCHING BY CIVILIANS. MOST EQUATORIAL GUINEAN WOMEN AND CHILDREN HAVE NOW APPARENTLY BEEN RELEASED BUT MANY ADULT MALES WITHOUT RESIDENT OR WORK PERMITS HAVE NOT BEEN.

2. THE "CENSUS" CAMPAIGN WAS ANNOUNCED OFFICIALLY AS ONE THAT HAD BEEN PLANNED FOR SEVERAL WEEKS AND
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AS BEING UNDERTAKEN ONLY AFTER CONSULTATION WITH AND ASSURANCES TO RESIDENT UNHCR. ACCORDING TO PRESS AND RADIO, GENUINE REFUGEES HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR. NEWS STORIES ASSERTED, HOWEVER, THAT RECENT CASES OF AGITATORS AMONG THE EQUATORIAL GUINEAN POPULATION, INCLUDING EVENTS LEADING TO THE ARREST OF SEVENTEEN IN EARLY JANUARY FOR ANTI-GABONESE ACTIVITIES, HAVE

NECESSITATED COUNTER MEASURES.

3. BOTH OFFICIAL AND PRIVATE EMBASSY SOURCES REPORT THAT TROUBLE WAS SPARKED BY NON-RETURN OF A GABONESE GENDARME WHO WENT TO EQUATORIAL GUINEA TO GET HIS WIFE. WHEN NEWS WAS RECEIVED THAT THE GENDARME HAD BEEN KILLED, A PARTY OF 20 GENDARMES (APPARENTLY OFFICIALLY SANCTIONED) WENT TO RETRIEVE HIS BODY. THEY HAVE NOT RETURNED. WHEN THIS WORD SPREAD, EQUATORIAL GUINEAN HOMES AND STORES WERE SET AFIRE WITH ONE OR MORE LYNCHINGS. OFFICIAL GABONESE SOURCES REPORT THAT THE CLASHING GROUPS HAVE NOW BEEN SEPARATED. ONE US EMBASSY OFFICER REPORTED FEBRUARY 18 SEEING APPROXIMATELY 100 EQUATORIAL GUINEANS UNDER GUARD SQUATTING ON THE TARMAC AT LEON MBA AIRPORT. SPECULATION IS THAT THEY ARE BEING HELD HOSTAGE UNTIL THE RETURN OF THE 20 MAN GABONESE GENDARMERIE GROUP.

4. NOT ALL SOURCES AGREE THAT THE FOREGOING PROVIDES FULL EXPLANATION FOR THE ANTI-EQUATORIAL GUINEAN CAMPAIGN WHICH, ALTHOUGH MORE BRUTAL, IS NOT DISSIMILAR FROM OTHER PERIODIC CAMPAIGNS AGAINST AFRICANS FROM NEIGHBORING STATES WITHOUT DOCUMENTATION. SOME RESIDENT FRENCH BELIEVE THAT PRESIDENT BONGO SENT OUT WORD TO ROUND UP ALL SUSPICIOUS EQUATORIAL GUINEANS
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AFTER HAVING FOUND SEVERAL OF THEM INVOLVED IN THE UNIVERSITY STRIKE AT THE END OF JANUARY INCLUDING ONE WHO HAD VISITED BOTH MOSCOW AND HAVANA.

5. OVER THE YEARS AND ESPECIALLY SINCE THE ATROCITIES OF PRESIDENT MASIE'S REGIME, EQUATORIAL GUINEANS HAVE GRAVITATED TO GABON SEEKING WEALTH AND SAFETY. THEY ARE PRIMARILY FANGS WHO HAVE TIES WITH GABONESE FANGS. THE UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE ESTIMATES THERE MAY BE 70,000 "REFUGEES" IN GABON (TEN PERCENT OF THE TOTAL POPULATION). IN GENERAL THE EQUATORIAL GUINEANS HAVE BEEN ABSORBED INTO THE POPULATION AND ARE NOT IN REFUGEE CAMPS. BONGO, FROM THE RELATIVELY SMALL BATEKE TRIBAL GROUPING, CONSIDERS THE LARGE RESIDENT FANG POPULATION SWOLLEN BY EQUATORIAL GUINEANS, AS ACTUAL OR POTENTIAL OPPOSITION. (THE FANGS HAVE BEEN OUT OF THE CENTER OF POWER SINCE THE 1967 DEATH OF PRESIDENT MBA) CONSEQUENTLY, ACCORDING TO THIS REASONING, HE PERIODICALLY TAKES MEASURES TO KEEP THEM OFF BALANCE. YATES

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: HARASSMENT, FOREIGN WORKERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 21 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978LIBREV00451
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780078-0449
Format: TEL
From: LIBREVILLE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780233/aaaabbwp.tel
Line Count: 113
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: ab0161d3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3537976
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ROUNDUP OF EQUATORIAL GUINEANS
TAGS: PEPR, PINS, SHUM, GB, EK
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/ab0161d3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014